"It's a **security risk**"

Burqas are no more of a security risk than a motorcycle helmet, big fashion sunglasses, or a big beanie, and can be removed when identification is required for security reasons. Of course, the request for removal should be done by another woman and not in the presence of men (where possible).

"It's against **community values**"

Wearing the burqa does not go against acceptable community values. Community values necessitate that people should not be judged by what they wear, nor discriminated against or mistreated, based on their choice of clothing or appearance.

WHY PEOPLE **FEAR** THE **BURQA**

Does it make sense to pass judgement on someone without first verifying the facts?

No doubt, seeing women wearing the burqa is strange for many people. It is not a common sight, as only a minority of Muslim women wear it, and as such it is new and unfamiliar to many. This fact does not make the burqa something which ought to be feared or hated. The fierce media campaign of fear which has been launched against the burqa has caused many people to pass judgment on this Islamic practice without having any knowledge of its significance. It is important to consider who benefits from such prejudiced propaganda. Some political parties, for example, capitalise on people's misunderstandings and fears in order to make political gains.

THE **RIGHT** TO **FREEDOM** OF **RELIGION** & **EXPRESSION**

Modern societies were founded on the basis of freedom and liberty. This entitles their members to freely practise their own religion and dress as they wish. Banning the burqa goes against these very core values, and is a form of hypocrisy and double standards. In fact, there are international laws which explicitly ensure people's right to expression and to practise their religion.

"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to… manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 18:1

Furthermore, banning a religious item based merely on emotional rhetoric may open the door to further discrimination and human rights abuses. It is worth noting that Nazi Germany first began with minor discrimination against Jews and other minorities, then, when that was accepted, proceeded with more severe repression.

SHOULD THE **BURQA** BE **BANNED?**

Banning the burqa not only breaches international law but is highly discriminatory, leading to a number of harmful social impacts. It will only serve to vilify Muslim communities and create distrust between Muslims and the communities in which they live. While claiming to protect Muslim women, a ban would make life intolerable for those who wear the burqa, forcing them to choose between defying their beliefs simply to leave the house, or not leaving the house at all. Additionally, such a ban will also amount to double standards, as other religious symbols and clothing are not only tolerated, but respected, such as the clothing of nuns, Buddhist monks, orthodox priests and rabbis.

CONCLUSION

The burqa is clearly not oppressive or anti-social. It does not pose security risks or create barriers between the wearer and society. Rather, it is the personal choice of women wanting to gain closeness to God, and should be respected as such. Having a debate over whether to ban a well established religious practice is in itself discrimination, and goes against the very values which ought to be protected. Being tolerant does not only mean accepting people who look and act exactly like you; but accepting the choices of other people, especially, if you do not understand or agree with them.

In a time where women have more and more freedom to make choices, is it not strange that the most basic freedom, the freedom to choose what to wear, is being taken away from Muslim women in many modern societies? If forcing someone to wear the burqa is oppressive, is not forcing someone to remove it equally oppressive?

v1.01

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THE **BURQA** & **NIQAB**

UNCOVERING THE FACTS

I AM NOT WHAT I APPEAR TO BE

learn the **basics**

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The burqa and niqab have become a topic of much controversy and heated debate. A number of countries have banned the wearing of these religious garments, while others have considered banning or limiting their use.

Many arguments have been made against the wearing of the burqa and niqab, claiming they are anti-social, backward, oppressive, and not part of Islam. This pamphlet discusses the burqa and niqab from an Islamic viewpoint and addresses the many concerns and allegations made against the wearing of these garments.

TYPES OF **ISLAMIC DRESS**

"O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters, as well as all believing women, that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments (when in public): this will be more conducive to their being recognised as decent women and not molested."

Quran 33:59

There are three main types of Islamic dress relating to women when in public:

1. Hijab

This is the most common type of Islamic dress, which covers the woman's body, leaving only her face and hands visible.

2. Niqab

This type is like the hijab, except it also covers part of the face, leaving only the eyes visible.

3. Burqa

This type is the least common, and involves covering the whole body as well as covering the face with mesh, so that the eyes are not visible.

The hijab can generally be found amongst Muslim women all over the world, while the niqab and burqa are more common in specific regions.

It is not obligatory for a Muslim woman to dress in one of the above fashions in front of other women. It is only obligatory in the presence of men who are not closely related to her, as prescribed in Islam.

AN **ESTABLISHED** PRACTICE

There is no doubt that both the burqa and niqab have an Islamic basis, and that both have been commonly practised and recognised by Muslims throughout history. Islamic texts make it very clear that the hijab is compulsory for Muslim women to observe. Consequently, Islamic scholars have agreed that both the burqa and niqab are part of Islam, but have differed as to whether they are also compulsory or optional acts of virtue. This explains why some Muslim women wear the hijab, while others decide to wear the niqab or burqa.

COMMON **ALLEGATIONS**

Note: This pamphlet will refer to both the niqab and burqa simply as the burqa for the remaining sections.

"It's **oppressive**"

Muslim women who choose to wear the burqa do so out of their own free will, believing it is an act of worship and a form of liberation from the objectification of women in modern society. In fact, preventing Muslim women from practising their religion is what is truly oppressive.

"Niqab is a very liberating and empowering experience. It allows me to realise my goals by having a career and going to school without worrying about the prying eyes of men. It forces people not to judge me based on my appearance, but on my thoughts and character."

- Ms. Flavia, 22, USA

"It's **backwards**"

The burqa is not part of a short-lived fashion trend. It is a religious garment and act of worship which is not subject to time and therefore, does not become outdated. In fact, the burqa is gaining much popularity in modern societies, especially amongst Western convert women.

"My body is my business, and I shouldn't have to defend what I wear to anyone. The burqa is part of my religion, and the fact that I choose to wear it does not make me any less human."

- Ms. Yasmin, 21, Australia

"It's **intimidating**"

While the burqa may appear intimidating to some people, it is not worn with the intention of being threatening or frightening. People are often intimidated by what they have no knowledge of, and the burqa is a piece of clothing which should not warrant fearful reaction. Underneath the burqa is a person simply trying to practise their religion. It is interesting to note that other forms of dress and appearance are no longer considered intimidating, as they have become accepted by the wider community. Tattoos, extremely short dresses, revealing clothes, body piercing and outlandish hairstyles are all examples of this phenomena.

"It's a form of **male domination**"

Wearing the burqa does not in any way suggest that women are inferior to men. Claiming that the burqa is a symbol of male domination goes against the fact that many women voluntarily wear the burqa, even though some have no male relatives, or wear it against their male relatives' wishes.

"It's **anti-social**"

There is nothing in the burqa that prevents a woman from interacting with other members of society, or from participating in the community. In fact, neither the hijab nor the burqa are required when among women only.

Every woman who wears a burqa is a unique individual, and it is unfair and inaccurate to make a sweeping judgement about all such women based on one item of clothing they have in common.

"It **stops women** from **contributing** to society"

Wearing a burqa does not stop a woman from contributing to society or from pursuing higher education. There are many women who wear the burqa and are very highly educated, or lead very successful careers.

Every woman who wears a burqa is a unique individual, and it is unfair and inaccurate to make a sweeping judgement about all such women based on one item of clothing they have in common.

From the very advent of Islam, Aisha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was and still is renowned as one of the greatest Islamic scholars to have ever lived. The fact that she wore the burqa did not, in any way, hinder her from becoming such a prominent scholar or from teaching the men and women of her society.